

**LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES**  
**POST OFFICE BOX 98000**  
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Waterfowl Population Estimates  
in Louisiana's Coastal Zone Below  
U.S. Highway 90 and on Catahoula Lake.

Date: Coastal Zone, December 13-15, 2004,  
Catahoula Lake, Central & N.E.  
Louisiana, December 9-10, 2004  
N.W. Louisiana, December 8, 2004

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December 16, 2004

Pilot: B. Dorsa

Estimates made from Aircraft (\*) Estimate less than 1,000

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	92,000	26,000	*	118,000
MOTTLED	29,000	34,000	*	63,000
GADWALL	278,000	438,000	1,000	717,000
WIGEON	6,000	1,000	*	7,000
GW TEAL	221,000	133,000	*	354,000
BW TEAL	20,000	15,000	*	35,000
SHOVELER	25,000	1,000	*	26,000
PINTAIL	116,000	39,000	*	155,000
TOTAL DABBLERS	787,000	687,000	1,000	1,475,000
SCAUP	15,000	8,000	*	23,000
RINGNECKED	40,000	96,000	11,000	147,000
CANVASBACK	*	*	14,000	14,000
TOTAL DIVERS	55,000	104,000	25,000	184,000
TOTAL DUCKS	842,000	791,000	26,000	1,659,000
COOTS	42,000	473,000	*	515,000

**COMMENTS:**

The total duck estimate of 1.7 million recorded in this survey is well above that of last month's estimate (1 million), but below that of December's 2003 (2.3 million) , and well below the previous 5-year and long term averages (2.9 and 2.7 million respectively). This survey is similar to Dec 2001 (1.6 million) and those of the early 80's. Most species were well below long term

averages, especially mallards and wigeon. Ring-necked ducks were near the long-term average.

On a more positive note, small groups (<5000) of snow and white-fronted geese were commonly observed across the coastal zone, especially in the rice prairies. The strongest cold front of the winter occurred this week during the survey, and this may provide additional migrations into the state before the next split begins this Saturday, December 18.

In southwest Louisiana, water was high but coastal marshes continued to appear in good condition with fair to good amounts of submerged vegetation. Sheet water in the rice prairies was abundant with nearly continuous water noted in some areas. In southeast Louisiana, strong northerly winds during the survey created extremely low tides and reduced available habitat for waterfowl. Marshes in extreme southeast Louisiana affected by Hurricane Ivan still appear battered, but some recovery due to the extended growing season and warm fall has occurred. More waterfowl were observed in these areas than in November.

An additional 127,000 ducks and 128,000 geese were estimated in central and northeast Louisiana, where extensive backwater flooding and recent rains have created abundant habitat for waterfowl. Ducks and geese were widely distributed with few very large concentrations observed. At the time of the survey, the water stage at Catahoula Lake was 41 feet, more than 10 feet above the management goal, and this was largely responsible for the low numbers of ducks and nearly total lack of dabblers. The Lake has risen 2 more feet since the survey.

In northwest Louisiana, another 16,000 ducks (mostly mallards) were estimated on area lakes, WMAs, and the Red River.

For the month of November, statewide precipitation averaged over nine inches, four inches above normal and this was the fifth wettest November in more than 100 years. The abundance of wetland habitat across much of the state will make hunting difficult in some areas, but those hunters who adjust their strategies to these changing conditions should be more successful as the season progresses. Wet conditions extend northward into mid-latitude states.

This has been one of the mildest falls on record in most of the 14 states of the Mississippi Flyway. Some northern states ended their duck hunting seasons several weeks ago still waiting for cold weather to push birds south to them out of prairie Canada. Missouri reported its 13<sup>th</sup> warmest and wettest November on record, with excellent habitat throughout the state, and 658,100 (similar to last year) ducks from their early December survey. North Dakota reported its 14<sup>th</sup> warmest November on record. Minnesota reported most ducks had left the state by early December, but still reported some open water on larger lakes.

The second split of the waterfowl seasons opens statewide on Saturday, December 18.